

a r t + a s t o r i a

future of a creative community

FOR THE UNINITIATED, the Astoria Visual Arts (AVA) has had something of an iCloud presence in Astoria until recent years: it's everywhere, with exceptional and far-reaching influences, but difficult to corporeally nail down and thus, summarize.

Since its inception in 1989 AVA has worked to enhance, strengthen, and promote the arts in the greater Astoria area, with a dedicated emphasis on providing emerging artists with a sustainable livelihood and connection to the crucial for-profit world. Where art was, and for many communities still is, generally regulated to galleries and museum exhibitions, AVA has long sought to integrate it into public spaces, and challenge the notion that art is a separate--and somewhat elite--entity from the community at large.

It's no secret that 21st century Astoria has reblossomed into a hub of commerce and creative enterprise, and depending on who you speak to the consequences more or less cover The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly spectrum. A statement made by AVA as part of their official draft plan may sum it up perfectly:

This is a critical time for the arts in Astoria. With the cost of living and real estate steadily on the rise, many in our arts community are facing difficult choices about long-term sustainability in this area. During these dynamic times, it is important for us to work together towards common goals.



AVA Members (from left), Roger Hayes, Joe Miller-AVA pres, Sally Lackaff, Rebecca Rubens, Susan Planalp, Darren Orange.

In 2001, a decade after the formation of Astoria Visual Arts, founding member Rebecca Rubens rallied the rising artist synergy of the city. Many new young artists had come to Astoria, as well artists of varying age, mediums, experience – a veritable new melting pot of creativity and drive.

The time was right. AVA Gallery on 10th was to focus on emerging artists – creating a focus, a respectable venue, a collective, a volunteer-based vehicle pregnant with opportunity. What occurred over those years was miraculous and energizing. Many solo shows, group shows, visiting artists, collaborations, vision projects, some large in scale, such as the *Astoria River Walk public art* proposal—itsself controversial in nature, and the exuberant and playful *Cash & Carry* shows that had artists producing quick and often quirky but affordable art, usually during the holiday season. The *Stump Cozy* project, initiated by Portland artist Shannon Schollian invited local artists to knit or sew a piece designed to cover a bare tree stump in a clear cut forest area, that area just outside of Astoria on Hwy 30.

In an interview with HIPFISH in 2001, AVA member Jessica Schleif commented on providing space for untried artists to take the plunge into public showing

of their work, “This is art that doesn’t necessarily have a mainstream market appeal, but it’s important and it needs to be seen,” she said, “the funny thing, though, is it’s selling!”

Rubens commented in the same interview about integrating art into the community and Astoria’s working-class roots, “We want to keep this community with a wonderful working feel. You go to lots of communities that are beautiful, but they don’t have the soul Astoria has.”

The five to seven year period that AVA flourished in two spaces on 10th street, initiated, or perhaps defined an artist culture, one that was screaming for recognition of itself. The newly formed dispersed into many new factions, although we mourn the end of one.

The working class beauty of Astoria had begun to draw a cultural movement decades before. Today, a visitor to the Astoria 2nd Saturday Art Walk might not think about the genesis of this vibrant art scene, that maybe it just popped up, like a pop-up gallery, or that somehow the monthly art walk has gone on forever, or perhaps the well-oiled moved in to claim and gratefully gentryfy the city.

- Dinah Urell

NEXT MONTH Part II - Stay tuned for some Astoria art history!

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ASTORIA OPEN STUDIO TOUR

ASTORIA OPEN STUDIO TOUR Offers a Private Glimpse into Astoria's Vibrant Art Scene Astoria Visual Arts (AVA) invites the public to the 6th annual Astoria Open Studio Tour on Saturday and Sunday, July 30 and 31. Forty-seven artists in 24 locations throughout Astoria will open their personal studios providing visitors the opportunity to meet and engage with the artists, observe demonstrations and to purchase art. The studios will be open from 10 am to 4 pm each day. "This is a popular and fun event for locals, visitors and anyone curious about the opportunity to experience creative people and spaces -- spaces as quirky and individualistic as the artists themselves!" says Rebecca Rubens, President of AVA. "Everyone loves this tour -- home designers, tourists, families with children. It's a great way to meet some of Astoria's established artists and to discover emerging artists. Astoria's renaissance has been a magnet for a new wave of artistic talent." Astoria's Studio Tour brings together painters, printmakers, textile artists, sculptors, photographers, glass artists and artists working in many other types of media. This event is free and self-guided. Tour catalogs are also free and may be picked up each studio and at Studio 11 Gallery, RiverSea Gallery, Imogen Gallery and Maiden Astoria in early July. More information is available at www.astoriavisualarts.org.



Recology Artist in residence, Dawn Stetzel of Seaview Washington displays her sculpture, Housedress. "My process is to not just make art out of trash," says Stetzel. "There is a story to all the material that I collect, a strong connection to place and the people who live here. For me this way of making is a life-path of stewardship and creative problem-solving that provides a connection to each other and the environment."

Those common goals are what bring AVA board members together, and AVA president Rebecca Rubens (artist name Agnes Field) reflects, "Growth and development can happen without destroying the special quality of local experience. I think this area is unique and has its own brand of communication, and deserves to be recognized." Rubens has not only played an integral part in seeing AVA through its early foundational stages, but in actively pursuing projects and ventures that will carry AVA into the next chapter. Originally founded as an artist-run non-profit, the AVA has undergone many incarnations since then. As of early 2015 a new board was established, with the primary goal of focusing on broader community support and specifically seeking members with diversified skills and interests in managing programs and fundraising. "We have been very fortunate to find people passionate about art and the valuable role art can take in the rapidly changing community," says Rubens.

2015-2016 have already been noteworthy years in AVA's steady progression, highlighted by several game-changing developments in particular. In early spring AVA welcomed three emerging artists to work in downtown studios provided to them rent-free as part of the artist-in-residence program (AVA a-i-r), additionally supplemented by the generous support of local businesses Albatross & Co., the Astoria Coffee House & Bistro, City Lumber Company, Dots 'N Doodles Art Supplies, and the Fort George Brewery + Public House.

The residencies run for 3 month intervals, and are just the beginning of a much more ambitious frame of purpose and collaboration. (Astoria artist Sarah Hendrickson was the founding participant of 2015.) "I am very excited to see the artist-in-residence program grow with the new cooperation with Recology Western Oregon--the Coastal Oregon Artist Residency (COAR)," Rubens says. "The two artists [Sean Barrow

and Dawn Stetzel] have been selected and will begin work on July 11 using recycled materials in their work. This is exciting because not only do the artists receive studio space, but also a stipend that supports their effort." She continues, "The AVA a.i.r has also broadened to include a writers' residency, beginning this month, in another new space above Pier 11, with incredible views of the Columbia River. This will be an invitational until we have determined the suitability of the space and management. I am encouraged to think we might be able to open up the a.i.r to include more regional, national and possibly international artists."

The aforementioned Recology Western Oregon (RWO) is an employee-owned company that manages resource recovery facilities on the North Coast, and their partnership with AVA to form the Coastal Oregon Artist Residency is the embodiment of conscientious creativity. The COAR not only provides selected artists with on-site access to discarded materials and studio space at the Recycling Center, but a public exhibition at the end of their residency showcasing their work, the hope being to encourage people to rethink "waste" and utilize new ways of conserving natural resources.

The Portland Biennial July 9 – Sept 18

The Portland Biennial is soon to play a significant part in AVA's expansion as well; a major survey of definitive Oregon visual artists, the Biennial originated with the Portland Art Museum in 1949, and met an abrupt end in 2006, resulting in the loss of a pertinent platform for artistic career advancement. In 2010, Disjecta Contemporary Art Cen-

ter introduced a renewed Biennial with rotating guest curators and multiple venues across the region. 2016 curator Michelle Grabner selected regionalism as the focal theme, the reflection of immediate geography and culture in an artist's work and, on a broader scale, the impact of local dynamics on the global art world. According to the most recent Biennial press release Grabner reviewed over 400 applicants and conducted 107 studio visits, traveling over 1800 miles throughout Oregon, making it the most comprehensive survey of Oregon artists ever. Works from 34 artists will be featured in 25 partner venues in 11 communities across the state, including Astoria's Astor Hotel lobby (Avantika Bawa) and Clatsop Community College's Royal Nebeker Art Gallery, (Jack Fetherly and Julia Oldham) co-hosted by AVA on behalf of Disjecta..

In addition to its wider regional outreach, the AVA is partnering with Astoria High School (AHS) and Knappa High School (KHS) to provide community-based learning opportunities for students, with the intent to build content knowledge and develop skills in the visual arts through regularly scheduled workshops with local artists both on school campus and in studio environments, visits to regional Pacific Northwest art galleries and museums, post-secondary art class attendance during such visits, and participation in a teen arts competition, the results of which will be a juried art exhibition. The partnership was made possible through a recent grant provided by the

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Sean Barrow's Bee on a Hill. Barrow's goal is to complete a series of sculptures made from recycled materials as an artist in residence through the Recology/AVA grant.

The two artists were selected by a jury of arts and environmental professionals. Each will be provided with a monthly stipend, materials, and dedicated studio space at RWO's Astoria Recycling Depot and Transfer Station over a three-month period, commencing on July 11, 2016. By supporting artists who work with recycled materials, AVA and RWO hope to encourage people to conserve natural resources and promote new ways of thinking about art and the environment.



Gallerist Teri Sund, (w/ artist Christos) AVA Board Member has a longtime art connection to Astoria and the coastal region leading to the ownership of IMOGEN Gallery on 11th st.

Irene Gerlinger Swindells Fund of The Oregon Community Foundation, as well as board member participation. Says AVA Vice President Lisa Smith, "Research-based evidence points to arts education as a key influence in building broad skills and competencies in students, improving academic performance, and creating a positive school culture." As the project lead for the expansion of the Miss Bea Johnson Fund for Young Artists, established in 2011 through the generosity of local artists Noel and Pat Thomas to promote fine arts in school, Smith stresses the importance of art in the classroom as well as the gallery.

Two AVA affiliated projects that evoke an exceptionally visceral response are The Luna-Phaser and OBON 2015. Jim Fink's selected sculpture from the AVA's 2004-2005 ARTS Walk Project, The Luna-Phaser is an exploration of the tidal relationship between the moon and river, with the lunar mechanism shifting in accordance to the ebb and flood of the tide, essentially mirroring the synchronicity of the actual moon cycles. Progress on the project was suspended due to recession era funding challenges, with a reception on October 17, 2015 marking the relaunch.

The OBON Society is an Astoria based non-profit humanitarian organization dedicated to aiding the reconciliation between family and loved ones through the return of personal items taken during war. OBON 2015 was an AVA sponsored Japanese-American art history project dedicated to documenting, exhibiting, and returning personal artifacts and memorabilia seized as battlefield souvenirs during World War II. The exhibit "A Peaceful Return: The Story of the Yosegaki Hinomaru" opened at the Columbia River Maritime Museum on September 25, 2015.

Community Thread

However eclectic the AVA's vocations, the common connecting thread is simple: community. Though often perceived as one's immediate town or social circle, community where art is concerned has always existed as a much broader definition, even more so thanks to today's wider web reach and social media. What was once deemed exclusive need not apply these days—everything, from the written word to the visual, is relatable and,

one can hope, accessible. Now more than ever we humans are in a position to connect and share our experiences as a whole, rather than in factions separated by race, culture, religion, and social bearing. From the local showcases at the AVA Gallery more than a decade ago to recent talks of international residencies, AVA has stuck to its native roots while continuing to extend outward and intertwine.

Speaking with Teri Sund, owner and director of Imogen Gallery and AVA board member, brings the focus back on community, and just what it is that makes Astoria such a unique destination for artists and the appreciative alike. Arriving in Astoria after overseeing a Co-Op gallery in Seattle and Cannon Beach's White Bird Gallery, Sund went on to work with River Sea Gallery for well over a decade, acting as gallery director for Clatsop Community College as well. "It was a lot of fun," Sund says, "it was purely art for educational purposes. We brought in international artists so it really gave me an opportunity to bring a broader visual world to the area. That was really exciting for me." Recalling the many notable artists she's worked with over the years, including globally acclaimed photographer Robert Adams and the late Royal Nebeker (for whom the gallery is now named), Sund reflects, "I see all things as being connected, and a continuation to my participation in the Astoria arts community. I take great pride in bringing outside artists to participate with our local community of artists, and sharing the richness of our community with others." When asked about the impact of Astoria on the greater art world as voiced by first-time visitors, Sund expounds, "These individuals from other places are always immensely impressed by both the artists and the com-

ON THE RADAR Art in the Cross-hairs

WHENEVER I have the chance to sit and look at the Columbia River and its environs, I am filled with the awe nature always provides. We, who live here, sometimes forget the magnificence when viewed on a daily basis--sight needs surprise and freshness to re-imagine. I love driving up over the south hills of Astoria that suddenly open to the expansive breath-grabbing view of the Columbia River.

Unfortunately, the expansive sensation is fleeting and overcome by the in-difference of daily routines and obligations. Or perhaps we seek refuge in the daily routine. Living in a time where nothing is as it seems to be, does create anxious choices. What to do? Time is limited. Maybe all we can do is get up and go to work again.

We are caught in the cross-hairs of global dilemmas--terror, global disasters, destruction and despair. It is still possible to be oblivious in smug se-curity. It's all too far away from the hearth. In the mean time, head-in-the-sand has never been a safe solution for any crisis.

It is too much to suggest that global disasters can be remedied by fragile and perishable canvas, bits of wood or clay, or an ephemeral song. What art can do is change awareness and perception--of ourselves in relation to nature, and the value and significance of life. Art stakes out new territory and informs us what is possible for the human spirit. Any creative act is "thinking outside the box"--away from the prescribed and conditioned.

Perhaps what we need is more improvisation. Art, by its very nature, escapes locked down behavior. The oblique language of art remains a common and free agent existing on all levels, from the child who holds a crayon, to anyone who tries to express their experience symbolically, whether it be in the lyrics of a pop tune or a painted masterpiece. I will be convinced by any art, even the slightest, that has its own true way of being in the world and expresses direct experience of reality. We need more improvisators capable of handling the unexpected or unforeseen. To im-provise one needs a fine sense of balance, a compelling sense of timing, and a casual fearlessness.

Even though art is common to all, it is important to be able to recognize greatness, or even the potential for greatness. The reason for rarity is the unlikely possibility that an artist is not only possessed with great talent, but also presented with great opportunity. Both elements are necessary. A great work of art, has a life of its own, continues to be relevant forever. Regardless, art needs to roll up its dilemmas and work, not only because we need solace and inspiration, but for all those who are never granted the time for imagination.

Agnes Field



Rubens, as New York art student



Longtime Astoria artist, Jim Fink's Luna-Phaser project, chosen as the 2004-2005 Arts River Walk Project, still under the wing, can be viewed in the window of the Liberty Theater on 112th.



Mineral Spirits - An installation by Avantika Bawa
Astor Hotel Lobby, Astoria. Part of the Portland2016 Biennale,
Curated by Michelle Grabner
July 9 – Sept 18

In *Mineral Spirits*, the immediacy of a crumbling opulence is parried with an over-polished assemblage of scaffoldings that are currently non-functional. Stretches of silence are interrupted with audio recordings of the building of the scaffold

These contrasts highlight the nuances of the architecture, the history of the Astor hotel and its current state of renovation. This staged approach creates a platform where dialogue between construction and deconstruction, past and present, process and product are explored.

munity in general and what they term as a level of "sophistication" with what they discover here."

Studio Tour

Along the same theme of art for education and art for enjoyment, there is also immersion, and the partaking of. Fiber artist and AVA board member Margaret Thierry teaches classes at the Astoria Fiber Arts Academy, which include floor loom weaving, knitting, felting, spinning, crocheting, and wool dyeing, to name a few. Fellow AVA board member and former artist in residence Annie Eskelin also heads up the Astoria Open Studio Tour, with the 6th annual tour taking place July 30-31st, in which forty-seven artists in 24 locations throughout Astoria open their studios to the public. Some, such as Darren Orange and Robert Paulmenn, are also

AVA board members, and guests are invited to meet and speak with the artists, view works in progress, purchase pieces of art, and partake in demonstrations. "After finishing an artist-in-residence with AVA in March, I asked how I could continue to stay involved and they answered in a big way!" Eskelin says. "The Studio Tour is a fabulous way to get people interested in artists' work and about the process that goes into each piece. Artists can sell work directly to patrons and visitors can develop a deeper connection to our area artists." "I think it's great to be exposed to the passion and skill of other board members, and their supportive efforts for the arts," adds Rubens. "I've had the opportunity to watch emerging artists grow and flourish, and as a working artist have been inspired by the creative energy of all the hard-working artists in the community." She continues, "I would like to see this area develop to the point where we have people coming here to look at art and we have people coming here to buy art, because it's such a wonderful place to come and visit, and you see amazing things you might not see anywhere else."

While the term "renaissance" is often used in regards to Astoria, it's apparent from speaking to many of the artists and AVA board members that the town has always had a creative undercurrent, which is more than a little dependent on the dedicated individuals who keep it a worthwhile priority. To that end AVA president Rebecca Rubens is frequently brought up in conversation, with peers such as Lisa Smith singing her praises: "She brings a real commitment to bringing her community together, which is very important to us. And that's why we have the board we have now." For the immediate interim AVA is still seeking a physical location of its own. "We're looking for a permanent home, because we would like to be able to have our own shows of our member's work, and other work," Smith states. "We would like to be able to host salons and forums. It's hard to do that when you don't have a spot."

At a time when rapid growth and subsequent uncertainty are very real factors of what many call Astoria's renaissance, the art scene is poised to provide more than mere diversion for the culturally inclined; it's the promise of sustainability. "The AVA is ready and poised to be a leader in supporting our art community," says Teri Sund, "with many great things planned. It's been incredibly exciting to watch the development of the art community for over 25 years." Speaking as an artist herself, Rubens adds, "I have tried to encompass the AVA work into my practice as an artist by approaching everything, especially decision-making, more as an artist, even if means taking a longer and less expedient route to desired ends. I think many artists have already benefited from AVA's direct support of artists through the residencies, and upcoming education and exhibition opportunities."

The Liberty Theater Announces "The Sunset Series" with Blind Pilot, Horse Feathers and More

Horse Feathers/Mandolin Orange - 7/13

Blind Pilot "And then Like Lions" Album Release - 8/20



Mandolin Orange

NPR called the 2013 release of the album 'This Side of Jordan,' "effortless and beautiful," naming it one of the year's best folk/Americana releases, while Magnet dubbed it "magnificent," and American Songwriter said it was "honest music, shot through with coed harmonies, sweeping fiddle, mandolin, acoustic guitar and the sort of unfakeable intimacy that bonds simpatico musicians like Gillian Welch and David Rawlings." The record earned them performances everywhere from the iconic Newport Folk Festival to Pickathon, as well as tours with Willie Watson, Gregory Alan Isakov, The Wood Brothers, and more. Mandolin Orange have a brand new record out "Such Jubilee," via Yep Roc Records and are touring North America in support of it.



Horse Feathers

With members scattered from Astoria, Portland and North Carolina, Horse Feathers are making a return to their Northwest stomping grounds for a one-off performance. After a run of shows opening up for Joe Pug, Horse Feathers seems to be on the brink of new material, the first since their 2014 Kill Rock Stars release, "So it is with Us." The album pulls influence from a varied mix of Pentangle, Talk Talk, Paul Simon, The Band, Van Morrison, John Wesley Harding era Bob Dylan, Desire era Bob Dylan, and Abner Jay. Along with longtime bandmates Nathan Crockett (strings/mandolin) and Dustin Dybvig (percussion/drums/keys), band-leader Justin Ringle brought Justin Power (bass/vocals) into the mix to have, "an honest to god rhythm section for the first time. With Lauren Vidal on cello and Brad Parsons singing harmonies, we played an impromptu show at Sasquatch and people liked it. We liked it, and the unusual feeling that I had after that show— which I think is referred to as "joy" — became something I wanted to experience again."



Blind Pilot

Blind Pilot has announced an extensive tour in support of the release of its first album since 2011, 'And Then Like Lions' (out Aug 12/ATO Records). The album was announced in tandem with a song premiere via NPR Music's All Songs Considered, for "Umpqua Rushing." "It's a hazy, quiet beauty that builds slowly but persistently," says NPR Music. The forthcoming 25+ date tour includes Music Hall of Williamsburg in New York, shows with Brandi Carlile and a return to Portland's Crystal Ballroom on October 20.

Written and composed by Blind Pilot's Israel Nebeker over the course of three years, the record is a transcendent, cathartic response to the loss of his father and end of a 13-year relationship. 'Lions' is Blind Pilot's most exhilarating album to date, a lush 10-song collection that is resilient, uplifting and often majestic in the face of tragedy.